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PRESS RELEASE

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MS-13 Members Convicted of Federal Racketeering Charges - Crimes Included Murder of One Victim, Maiming of Another -

WASHINGTON - Three members of MS-13, a notorious and violent gang, were convicted today by a jury of numerous federal racketeering charges for a series of crimes, including a murder, that took place in the Washington, D.C. area in 2006 and 2007.

The guilty verdicts, returned this morning, were announced by U.S. Attorney Ronald C. Machen Jr., John P. Torres, Special Agent in Charge of the Washington Office of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Office of Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), and Cathy L. Lanier, Chief of the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD).

The defendants were convicted following a trial that began October 26, 2010 before the Honorable Judge Richard J. Leon in U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia.

They included William Cordova, 26, also known as "Centinella" or "Mario;" Jose Gutierrez, 21, also known as "Astuto" or "Marco," and Melvin Sorto, 24, also known as "Killer" or "Fantasma." Among other crimes, they were convicted of taking part in a conspiracy that culminated in the murder of Edwin Ventura, 18, on April 22, 2007.

The men, all from the District of Columbia, were convicted of charges including murder in aid of racketeering, conspiracy to commit murder in aid of racketeering, maiming in aid of racketeering, assaults with dangerous weapons in aid of racketeering, threats in aid of racketeering, first degree murder while armed, assaults with intent to kill and other related offenses. A sentencing date was scheduled for March 15, 2011. All three defendants face a mandatory sentence of life imprisonment without parole.

All told, Cordova was convicted of 19 counts. Gutierrez was convicted of 16 counts, and Sorto was convicted of nine counts.

At trial, the government presented evidence of the defendants' membership in a criminal organization known as La Mara Salvatrucha, also known as MS-13. The government presented

evidence of a conspiracy by the defendants and the MS-13 organization to commit numerous violent crimes in aid of racketeering activity. The evidence included crimes of assaults, threats, maiming, extortion, witness intimidation, assaults with intent to kill and the murder of all rival gang members and persons that threatened the MS-13 Enterprise.

In reaching their verdicts, the jury found Cordova guilty of the assaults with a dangerous weapon in aid of racketeering of Dennis Diaz-Gutierrez, Josue Levia, and Jhosimar Alvarez-Torrez, on July 30, 2006, in the City of Alexandria, Virginia. The victims were shot numerous times as they sat inside a car, stationary, at a traffic light.

In addition, the jury found Cordova, Gutierrez, and Sorto guilty of the murder of Ventura and the assault with intent to kill of Nelson Maldonado, on April 22, 2007, in the 2900 block of Sherman Avenue NW, Washington, D.C. The victims were shot numerous times in retaliation for an ongoing feud with MS-13 members.

Cordova and Gutierrez were also convicted of the maiming and assault with intent to kill of Feliciano Flores-Esquina Flores, on June 1, 2007, in the 3000 block of Georgia Avenue NW, Washington, D.C. The victim was shot two times in the head as she stood at a bus stop.

The jury also found all three defendants guilty of numerous local District of Columbia related offenses.

"MS-13 is a ruthless street gang with international reach, but today's verdicts make clear that its brand of urban warfare will not be tolerated in the District of Columbia," said U.S. Attorney Machen. "This case demonstrated that MS-13 is willing to inflict violence on both rival gangs and innocent citizens. These convictions demonstrate that law enforcement and the community are united in our commitment to fight back and drive gang violence out of our neighborhoods."

"MS-13 has used violence to spread fear throughout our community," said Special Agent in Charge Torres. "As demonstrated by this trial, local members of the MS-13 gang operated with a level of brutality alarming even by street gang standards. Today's convictions send a clear message that ICE HSI will continue to work with its partners to rein in violent gangs like MS-13 to protect everyone from their cold-blooded conduct."

The prosecution is the result of an investigation initiated by the United States Attorney's Office, ICE Homeland Security Investigations, MPD, the Capitol Area Regional Fugitive Task Force, the City of Alexandria Police Department, and the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA).

In announcing the convictions, U.S. Attorney Machen, Special Agent in Charge Torres and Chief Lanier praised the efforts of the many people who worked on this case, including ICE Homeland Security Investigations Special Agents from the Washington, D.C. Field office, ICE HSI Attaché's office in El Salvador, and MPD Homicide Detectives Jed D. Worrell, Jacqueline Middleton, and Eduardo Voysest. They also recognized the work of MPD Detective Eddie

Vazquez of the Capitol Area Regional Fugitive Task Force, MPD Detectives Emilio Martinez and Elba Longo, MPD Officers Eliseo Medina, and Luciano Morales, and the DEA's Special Agent who worked on the case.

They also acknowledged the work of United States Attorney's Office support personnel Yvonne Bryant, Katina Adams, Dawn Tolson-Hightower, Michael Hailey, David Foster, Eric Urschel and Brendan Tracz. Finally, they praised Assistant United States Attorneys Gilberto Guerrero Jr., and Nihar Mohanty who investigated and prosecuted the case.

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